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'Exposed India': Trump says Delhi agreed to cut tariffs

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there.

"They've agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody's finally exposing them for what they've done. And the same thing with China, same thing with a lot of other countries, and the EU has been a terrible abuser of this country," Trump said in remarks from the Oval Office on Friday.

"India charges us massive tariffs, massive, you can't even sell anything into India. It's almost, it's almost restrictive. It is restrictive. We do very little business inside," he said.

Trump's comments came following Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's visit to the US for trade talks with his counterpart Howard Lutnick.

This was the third time this week that Trump has criticised the high tariffs charged by India.

On Thursday, Trump said India is a very high-tariff nation and reiterated that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2.

In the past, Trump has called India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser".

Last month, during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the White House, Trump said that India has "been very strong on tariffs".

Hours later, government sources said negotiations between India and the US for a trade deal have just begun and it would be premature to talk about its details,

It is natural for both the countries to have their interests and sensitivities and these are legitimate matters for a discussion, the sources said.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal was in the US this week to hold talks on the trade deal with his American counterpart as well as the US Trade Representative and their teams. *—PTI*

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1 dead in clashes on 1st day of Manipur's free movement

Shutdown announced in Kuki-Zo areas after buses attacked

IMPHAL, 8 MARCH

A protester was killed while 25 others, including women, were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces in different parts of Manipur's Kangpokpi on Saturday, officials said.

The deceased are Lalgouthang Singsit. The 30-year-old received bullet injuries during the clashes at Keithelmanbi and died on the way to hospital, police said.

Clashes erupted between demonstrators and security forces in the Kuki-dominated district after police fired tear gas to disperse them, as they opposed Union Home Minister Amit Shah's directive allowing free movement across the state.

The situation worsened when protesters set fire to private vehicles and attempted to stop a state transport bus traveling from Imphal to Senapati district.

Protesters also blocked NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur highway) and burned tyres to obstruct movement of government vehicles.

Kuki protesters during a road blockade in Manipur's Kangpokpi on Saturday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The protest was also directed against a peace march by the Federation of Civil Society (FOCS), a Meitei organisation.

The march, involving over 10 vehicles, was halted by security forces at Sekmai before it could reach Kangpokpi.

Police claimed they had been told to stop the march as they did not have permission.

However, FOCS members objected saying they were just following what Shah's instruction allowing free movement across the state from Saturday.

A purported video released by Kuki-Zo village volunteers group from an undisclosed location said it was against the government of India's decision regarding free movement and demanded a separate administration. The authenticity of the video could not be corroborated by PTI.

"Any attempt to enter our areas will be met with strong resistance. No free movement before separate administration" a volunteer was heard saying in the video.

Opposing the free movement initiative, the Kuki Zo Council has imposed an indefinite shutdown in all Kuki-Zo areas from Saturday midnight, a statement said.

"It is crucial for the central government to address the underlying issues to prevent further unrest and protect public safety. The Kuki-Zo Council urges the government to reconsider its stance to avoid further escalation of tension and violent confrontation," it added. *—PTI*

ISRAELI WOMAN RAPED

2 arrested in Hampi gangrape, hunt on for third

KOPPAL, 8 MARCH

Two of the three accused have been arrested by Hampi Police in a in alleged gangrape of two women and murder in a horiffic incident that has left the public outraged and shocked.

Three men allegedly assaulted and gangraped two women, including a 27-year-old Israeli tourist, who along with three other men were stargazing near Hampi, police said on Saturday.

The arrested suspects have been identified as 22-year-old Mallesh alias Handi Malla and 21-year-old Chetan Sai Sillekyatar, both residents of Sainagar in Gangavathi taluk, Koppal district, about 350 km from Bengaluru

"Out of the three accused, we have arrested two and efforts are being taken to nab the third suspect in the case," Ram L Arasiddi, Superintendent of Police of Koppal said.

According to the Police, a five-member group one each from Israel and America nationals had come to Hampi in Koppal district to attend a musical concert on Thursday. On the same day, after dinner, a 29-year-old homestay operator, along with the Israeli tourist and three male tourists, were sitting by the left bank of the Tungabhadra Canal near Sanapur Lake, playing the guitar, enjoying music, and stargazing.

Among the male tourists, one was from the United States, while the others were from Odisha and Maharashtra, police said.

According to the FIR, the group was approached by three men around 25 years old spoke in both Kannada and Telugu asking for directions to the nearest petrol bunk, then they started demanding money. When they were refused, the three men started assaulting the tourists. Three male tourists who were with the women were pushed into a canal. While the male tourists were trying to stay afloat, the three men raped the two women also stealing mobile phones and cash.

The accused fled on a motorcycle after the assault, the complainant alleged.

Two male tourists sustained injuries. The Police have recovered the body of the third on Saturday night.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered at Gangavathi Rural Police Station under sections related to extortion, robbery or dacoity with intent to cause death or grievous hurt, gang rape, and attempted murder under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The two women are undergoing treatment at a hospital. *—Salar News*

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India lifts export ban on broken rice

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The government has lifted the export ban on broken rice to promote its shipments. The ban was imposed in September 2022. Exporters have earlier urged the government to permit the shipments due to the rise in in-ventories. Last year, the government removed the minimum export price (MEP) of USD 490 per tonne on over-seas shipments of non-basmati white rice and withdrew a blanket ban on the shipments of this variety. These measures came at a time when the country has ample rice stock at government godowns and retail prices are also under control. The export restriction was imposed as the Russia-Ukraine war had disrupted the foodgrain supply chain. Though there was a ban on exports, the government allowed the shipments to friendly and needy countries on a request basis. *—PTI*

India, Mauritius to sign several pacts during PM's visit

Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming two-day visit to Mauritius, several agreements will be signed focusing on capacity building, trade enhancement, and combating cross-border financial crimes. Modi is set to attend the national day celebrations of Mauritius as the chief guest on 12 March.

At a recent media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri announced that these agreements aim to strengthen cooperation in various fields, including small and medium enterprises. The visit is expected to serve as an opportunity for both nations to review their bilateral ties and outline future engagements.

Misri emphasised the strong maritime relationship between India and Mauritius, highlighting India's role as a preferred development partner over the last decade. An Indian defence contingent and a ship from the Indian Navy will also participate in the national celebrations.

The historical ties between India and Mauritius can be attributed to the significant Indian-origin population, which constitutes nearly 70 per cent of the island nation's 1.2 million residents. Since 2005, India has been among Mauritius's largest trading partners. In the financial year 2022-2023, Indian exports to the island reached USD 462 million, while exports from Mauritius to India amounted to USD 91.5 million, bringing the total trade volume to USD 554 million, a 132 per cent increase since 2005-06. *—PTI*

Kharge urges CM, DKS to unite amid power tussle

KALABURAGI, 8 MARCH

Amid the ongoing power tussle within the ruling Congress in Karnataka, party president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday exhorted Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM D K Shivakumar to work together and prioritise the state's development.

He also said if they remain apart and move in different directions it would be 'difficult.'

The leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha was speaking at an event to flag off Kalyana Patha project at Jewargi here. The project will be undertaken at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore.

Lauding Siddaramaiah for presenting a record 16th budget on Friday, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge described it as a 'good budget' and emphasised that the party consistently supported and encouraged individuals doing good work. He highlighted that the people of the state are now benefiting from it. Kharge also praised Shivakumar for his past work as Minister for Energy, Irrigation Minister, and as the state Congress president.

"I complement Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar. Together you (both) should go ahead and focus more on the development of the state. If we overlook development, definitely people won't like us." Congress leaders are divided with some supporting Shivakumar who has made no bones of his Chief Ministerial aspirations, while supporters of Siddaramaiah have been asserting that he will complete his five year term as Chief Minister. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

600 dead in 2 days of revenge killing in Syria

BEIRUT, 8 MARCH

The death toll from two days of clashes between security forces and loyalists of ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad risen to more than 600, a war monitoring group said on Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The clashes, which erupted on Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority from Asad.

The revenge killings that followed on Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against mem-bers of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the over-throw of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades.

Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said 428 Alawites were killed. *—PTI*

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Worst hit areas include Idlib, says the UN, where millions of displaced people live in tents ***PHOTO: X***

CELEBRATING WOMEN

Women take selfies and explore stalls at the International Women's Day event organized by the Department of Women and Child Welfare in Bengaluru on Saturday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

>>>More on Pages 2, 3, 4 & 5

'VIOLATES INNOCENT DAUGHTERS'

MP to bring in death row for religious conversion

BHOPAL, 8 MARCH

In a significant statement made during a programme commemorating International Women's Day, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced that his government intends to introduce a death penalty provision for the religious conversion of girls, similar to existing penalties for the rape of minors.

Yadav declared, "The government is very strict against those who violate innocent daughters. A provision for the death penalty has been made in this regard. In addition, a provision for capital punishment will also be established in the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act concerning illegal conversions," underscoring a commitment to combat what he termed "evil practices."

The Chief Minister expressed that the state would not tolerate individuals involved in unlawful conversions, stating, "The government has resolved to deal strictly with such wrongdoings." Following the event, Yadav took to X to reaffirm his administration's dedication to protecting and respecting women, adding that the new provision for capital punishment aims to safeguard girls from forced religious conversions.

In conjunction with these announcements, Yadav digitally transferred Rs 1,552.73 crore (approximately £151 million) to over 1.27 crore beneficiaries of the 'Ladli Behna Yojana,' a monthly financial assistance scheme aimed at women. Additionally, he authorised a grant of Rs 55.95 crore to support more than 26 lakh eligible beneficiaries under the LPG Cylinder Refill Scheme, which provides a subsidy of Rs 450 per cylinder each month.

This initiative marks a notable step in the state's efforts to enhance women's welfare and protect their rights. *—PTI*

4 from Kalaburagi killed in head-on collision

KALABURGI, 8 MARCH

A fatal accident occurred near Abal (T) village in Sedam Taluk, Kalaburgi district, on Friday when two bikes collided head-on, killing four young men. The victims, Siddu, 25, Suresh, 20, Mallikarjun, 20, and Prakash, 19, were all residents of Habal village. One bike, travelling from Sedam towards Abal, collided with another bike coming from the opposite direction. Mallikarjun and Siddu died at the scene, while Suresh and Prakash succumbed to their injuries en route to the hospital. *—Salar News*

IISc to host longevity India conference

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) will host the Longevity India Conference—Rise for Healthy Aging from March 10-12, 2025, in Bengaluru. The conference will bring together scientists, researchers, and industry leaders to explore solutions for healthy aging and longevity. Discussions will cover age-related diseases, healthcare innovations, senior living, mental health, and policies to improve seniors' quality of life. Renowned experts such as Brian Kennedy, David Furman, and Hanno Steen will lead sessions on medical technologies, personalised medicine, and senior care innovations. Prashanth Prakash, Founding Patron of Longevity India, stressed the role of startups in senior care, while Deepak Kumar Saini, convener of the event, emphasised collaboration to address aging challenges. *—Salar News*

Metro Purple Line services to be partially suspended

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced a partial suspension of services on the Purple Line between Magadi Road and MG Road stations on Sunday, March 9, for essential track maintenance work. The disruption will last for three hours, from 7am to 10am, affecting several key stations including Cubbon Park, Dr. BR Ambedkar Station, and Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station. BMRCL stated that this maintenance is routine and scheduled on a Sunday to reduce inconvenience for commuters, as many offices are closed on weekends. Passengers are advised to plan their journeys accordingly and consider alternative transport options during the suspension period. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: XXX

Bank employee found dead amid harassment claims

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

A 32-year-old bank employee, Vivek Samadarshi, tragically died by suicide at his flat in Talaghattapura late on Friday evening. Vivek, who worked in the loan department at ICICI Bank, reportedly made a video call to his wife around 10pm, during which he expressed concerns about harassment from a superior at work. Moments later, on the same call, he allegedly hanged himself. In shock, Vivek's wife contacted his friends, who quickly arrived at the apartment and informed the police. Officers from Talaghattapura subsequently arrived at the scene, where they conducted an inspection and transferred the body for a post-mortem examination. Although no suicide note was found, initial inquiries indicate that workplace harassment may have contributed to his decision. Bank officials are expected to be summoned to address the allegations of harassment. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

CM assures action in Hampi rape; Opposition cries 'wolf'

Opposition accuses govt of turning a blind eye to crimes

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Police personnel conduct an investigation after two women were allegedly raped near the Hampi heritage site. Inset: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and BJP Leader BY Vijayendra **PHOTO: PTI**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday condemned the 'rape' of two women, including a foreign national in Koppal district, and assured that his government is committed to providing protection to everyone, including tourists, coming to the state.

He said that all necessary measures will be taken to ensure that such incidents do not recur. Taking to social media platform 'X', he termed the attack and rape of the Israeli citizen and homestay owner in Sanapur, in Koppal district as a 'most heinous act'.

"As soon as the incident was reported, I obtained information from the relevant police, conducted a thorough investigation, and instructed them to quickly identify the culprits," he said.

The CM further said the police have arrested two accused in connection with the case and are continuing the investigation.

"Our government is committed to providing protection to everyone, including tourists, coming to the state. All necessary measures will be taken to ensure that such incidents do not recur," he assured.

However opposition party has accused the state government of turning a blind eye to the suffering of its people. The Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra took to 'X', and said, "It is deeply disturbing to hear about the horrific rape of two women, a foreign national and a homestay owner reportedly from Koppal district, near the Tungabhadra canal. Criminals now act with impunity, unafraid of consequences, even in the immediate aftermath of Hampi Utsava, a festival that honors the grand legacy of the Vijayanagara Empire. The stark contrast between the state's glorious past and its present lawlessness is truly disheartening." *—PTI*

BRAND BENGALURU

DKS hails Budget as model for B'luru development

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

DK SHIVAKUMAR **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has characterised the recent state budget as a pioneering framework for urban development, particularly within the metropolis of Bengaluru. Highlighting the emphasis on infrastructure improvement, he noted key projects aimed at alleviating the city's notorious traffic congestion, including an ambitious tunnel road initiative.

Shivakumar, who also oversees Bengaluru development, revealed plans to construct an extensive network of new roads, estimating an addition of between 700 and 800 km. "This budget is a model for the country. It is designed not just for us but for the benefit of Bengaluru's 14 million residents," he asserted. Key elements of the budget include the construction of flyovers, including double-decker designs, with significant financial backing from both the city corporation and Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited. The Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah, outlined a commitment of Rs 19,000 crore as a guarantee for the BBMP to undertake significant tunnel projects, contributing to a total cost of Rs 40,000 crore for constructing a 40.5 km double-decker flyover alongside the Metro Phase 3 project. *—Salar News*

'SIDDARAMAIAH TO REMAIN CM & PRESENT NEXT BUDGET'

MYSURU, 8 MARCH

MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah on Saturday said that there is no doubt about his father CM Siddaramaiah presenting next year's 19th budget. CM will continue to present a full five-year term budget.

Replying to question on State High Court cancellation of enforcement directorate summons issued to CMs wife BM Parvathi and state urban development minister BS Suresh in MUDA site allotment scam, Yathindra said that his mother was pained a lot by this scam, not she is relieved a lot by this relief by the court, he said.

Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna reaffirmed that Siddaramaiah, who also oversees the finance portfolio, will retain his position and present the budget next year. *—Salar News*

CII K'TAKA ENDORSES CM'S 'VISIONARY' BUDGET

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Karnataka has commended Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's 16th budget for fortifying the state's status as an economic powerhouse, focusing on growth, sustainability, and technological progress. Chairman N Venu praised the budget's emphasis on renewable energy and smart infrastructure, stating, "Expanding solar parks and promoting electric vehicles will accelerate Karnataka's clean energy transition." Vice Chairman Rabindra Srikantan welcomed initiatives like the Karnataka AI Innovation Hub, aimed at enhancing the digital landscape and creating jobs outside Bengaluru. *—Salar News*

MISSING TEEN FOUND IN UDUPI AFTER 10 DAYS

MANGALURU, 8 MARCH

A 19-year-old youth who had gone missing on 25 February, was found in Udupi on Saturday following a 10-day long search operation, police said.

After Diganth, a resident of Amemmar in Farangipete, went missing, the incident had sparked protests with leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) visiting his family to offer support and demanding swift action from authorities.

Taking the case seriously, the state government and the police department had deployed a team of over 40 personnel to trace him.

According to the police, the search effort included 30 officers from the District Armed Reserve (DAR), railway police, fire and rescue services, forensic teams, a dog squad, and drone surveillance.

Police also conducted multiple combing operations in various locations. With Diganth now located, police are in the process of bringing him back, and further investigations are underway, they said. *—PTI*

DRI tracks gold smuggling links to film industry, politicians

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The ongoing investigation into a Rs 12 crore gold smuggling case linked to actress Ranya Rao has intensified, with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) expanding its probe to include potential connections to influential figures within the Kannada film industry and certain politicians.

Officials have revealed that forensic analysis of Ranya's mobile phone has uncovered frequent communications with film producers, financiers, and political figures, suggesting a broader network associated with the smuggling operation. Investigators are now working to determine whether these individuals were involved in funding or facilitating the illicit gold trade. Sources indicate that Ranya's extravagant lifestyle and unexplained wealth, despite her limited acting career, have raised suspicions about her role as a carrier in a larger smuggling network. The DRI is also scrutinising the finances of her husband, businessman Jatin Hukkeri, to trace the origins of the funds allegedly used to procure the smuggled gold.

Ranya Rao **PHOTO: X**

The investigation has deepened with findings indicating possible political connections, leading officials to believe that prominent individuals may have utilised Ranya as a conduit for smuggling gold from Dubai and other locations. The DRI has already seized assets valued at Rs 17 crore linked to the case and is poised to summon key film and political figures. Further arrests are anticipated as the inquiry unfolds CBI has launched an investigation into gold smuggling, registering a case against individuals importing gold into India. *—Salar News*

Man held at KIA for smuggling Rs 3.4 crore gold

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

A visually impaired individual has been arrested at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, India, for allegedly smuggling gold worth approximately Rs 3.44cr from Dubai.

Acting on intelligence, customs officials intercepted the passenger upon arrival from Dubai on 4 March. A thorough inspection revealed 3,995.22grams of gold concealed beneath the individual's clothing. The seized gold, valued at Rs 3,44,38,796, has led to the registration of a smuggling case. This incident follows the recent arrest of Kannada actress Ranya Rao at Bengaluru Airport, where 14.2kg of gold worth Rs 12.56crore was recovered. *—PTI*

Karnataka transport unions threaten indefinite strike

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The Karnataka State Road Transport Employees' Union has issued a stern ultimatum to the state government, announcing plans for an indefinite statewide strike if their longstanding demands, including salary parity with government employees, are not addressed by 22 March. A critical meeting scheduled for 25 March will determine the strike date if the government remains unresponsive.

The union's primary demand is the implementation of the 7th Pay Commission for transport staff, a promise reportedly made by the Congress party in its election manifesto. Additionally, union members are seeking the payment of 38 months of overdue salary arrears, the organisation of labour union elections, and a resolution for the employment issues facing workers laid off during the 2021 strike.

Union President Chandru condemned the Congress-led government for its inaction despite nearly two years in office, warning that continued negligence towards transport workers' grievances could severely disrupt public transport across Karnataka.

Private transport unions have also issued an ultimatum, demanding the resolution of issues by 22 March. Should their grievances be dismissed, they are prepared to stage a private transport strike, compounding the crisis by affecting both state-run and private transport services. Should the government fail to intervene, Karnataka could face a dual transport strike. *—Salar News*

Doc with criminal cases appointed head in Yadgir

YOHAN P HONNADDI
YADGIRI, 8 MARCH

The District Health Officer (DHO) has stirred public outcry by appointing an official with a pending criminal case as the Administrative Medical Officer at Shahapur Public Hospital, defying a commissioner's order.

D Prabhuling Khadappa Mankar, who served as Yadgir District Health and Family Welfare Officer from September 2023 to August 2024, was suspended by the government following charges from the Lokayukta regarding the accumulation of assets beyond known income, alongside a criminal case. An official circular, issued on 24 August, 2023, explicitly stated that individuals with criminal charges should not be appointed as medical officers in public hospitals unless approved as an exceptional case by the commissioner.

Lokayukta raid uncovered illegal assets at Mankar's residences, including immovable properties valued at Rs 1 crore **PHOTO: SALAR**

In December, a Lokayukta raid uncovered substantial illegal assets at Mankar's residences, including immovable properties valued at Rs 1 crore, cash amounting to Rs. 49.04 lakh, and items worth Rs. 1.49 crore. A **Salar News** fact-check confirmed the veracity of these findings.

Despite these allegations, Dr Mahesh Biradar, the current DHO, contravened both government orders and the commissioner's directive by appointing Dr. Mankar as Administrative Medical Officer.

In a statement to **Salar News**, Dr Biradar claimed, "We will review the commissioner's circular and the government's order carefully, and take necessary action."

Public outrage has surged, with social activist Siddu Pattedar condemning the DHO's blatant disregard for orders.

He stressed the need for immediate revocation of Dr Mankar's appointment, warning of potential protests if action is not taken.

Pattedar has also called for strict measures against Dr. Biradar, insisting that he be suspended for violating regulations. *—Salar News*

A SHOW OF COURAGE

B'luru cops honour officers on Women's Day

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

At the Monthly Service Parade held at the Central Armed Reserve (CAR) headquarters on Saturday, Bengaluru Police Commissioner B. Dayananda praised the dedication and exceptional performance of women police officers, highlighting their ability to undertake challenging roles alongside their male counterparts. The event, which celebrated International Women's Day, featured a special contingent of women officers taking the salute.

Commissioner Dayananda reflected on the significant shift in perceptions regarding women in policing. "A few years ago, there was a belief that women personnel were not suited for certain responsibilities traditionally assigned to men.

However, that mindset has completely changed today," he stated.

He noted a departmental survey revealing women officers' willingness to take on roles such as station writers and field duties. In response, the department has implemented equal work assignments to empower women further.

During the celebrations, 126 women officers and personnel were recognised with appreciation certificates for their outstanding service. Additionally, 32 electric autos were donated by corporate entities and distributed to women beneficiaries to promote economic independence in Bengaluru. *—Salar News*

An all-women railway crew was deployed to operate the Mysuru-Malgudi train at KSR Railway Station as part of International Women's Day celebrations on Saturday; A special contingent of women officers take part in Service Parade held at the Central Armed Reserve (CAR) in Bengaluru **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

IT Union calls for protest demanding labour laws

KOLAR, 8 MARCH

The Karnataka State IT/ITeS Employees Union (KITU) has called for a mass gathering of IT sector employees on 9 March here demanding stricter enforcement of labour laws and a healthy work-life balance.

The union aims to address concerns over excessive working hours, lack of overtime compensation, and the expectation for employees to be available beyond official working hours.

The gathering is being organised under the slogan 'A Healthy Work-Life Balance is Every Employee's Right'. The KITU said that a memorandum was submitted to the Labour Minister on March last year but concrete action was yet to be taken. *—PTI*

UP Minister downplays cop's Holi-Namaz remark

SAMBHAL, 8 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh minister Gulab Devi on Saturday played down the remarks of a circle officer that Holi comes only once a year, whereas the Jumma namaz takes place 52 times a year and said in a democracy, everyone is entitled to an opinion. The secondary education minister, who is the MLA from the Chandausi Assembly constituency (reserved for Scheduled Castes) in Sambhal district, also said all communities should celebrate their festivals together and maintain peace and order. The officer Anuj Chaudhary emphasised the need for communal harmony and strict vigilance to maintain law and order. —*PTI*

RJD's Tejashwi fumes as CM 'insults' Rabri

PATNA, 8 MARCH

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav has sharply reacted to the manner in which her mother and former Bihar CM Rabri Devi was addressed by Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar. During a debate with women members of the RJD inside the legislative council, the Chief Minister had pointed towards Devi, the Leader of the Opposition, and said in Hindi "her husband installed her when he hit a rough patch". Kumar's use of the expression "iske husband" was deemed as insulting and while members of her party opposed the same, Yadav said, "It shows the pitiable state of mind of the Chief Minister who is evidently not fit to run the state". Yadav, who is now Leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, reminded his ex-boss that "Rabri Devi is older than him. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

TMC demands probe into BJP leader's bribe claim

PANAJI, 8 MARCH

Law enforcement agencies probe the statement of BJP Leader Pandurang Madkaikar that he paid Rs 15-20 lakh as bribe to personal assistant of a Minister in the Pramod Sawant government in Goa to get a file cleared, Trinamool Congress National spokesperson Trojano D'Mello said. Madkaikar, had made the controversial statement after meeting his party's National General Secretary BL Santhosh here. "This statement is very serious. If it was made by some opposition member, then he would have been summoned for interrogation by all agencies including the CBI and ED. A minister in the Sawant government is seeking proof. Madkaikar himself is proof. He should be questioned," D'Mello told reporters. "The giver of the bribe is equally responsible as the one who accepts it. Why is Chief Minister Sawant silent on the issue," the TMC leader further asked. —*PTI*

Congress MLA Karra urges unity for J&K statehood

JAMMU, 8 MARCH

Asserting that statehood is not the privilege of any single political entity but the right of every citizen of Jammu and Kashmir, senior Congress MLA Tariq Hameed Karra called for a united stand on the restoration of statehood, urging all political parties to rise above their differences. He welcomed the budget presented by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah terming it a "lifeline" and a "bold step forward" after seven years under an "undemocratic setup." Congress leader described the current Assembly as an "extraordinary house working in extraordinary situations." —*PTI*

Delhi OKs Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, allocates ₹5,100 cr

It will provide monthly aid of Rs 2,500 to eligible women

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

In a significant move to aid women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the Delhi government, led by the BJP, has approved the Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, which will provide monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,500 to eligible women. An allocation of Rs 5,100 crore has been set aside for this initiative.

During a party event held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium to commemorate International Women's Day, BJP President JP Nadda announced the Cabinet's decision, commending Chief Minister Rekha Gupta for her leadership in implementing the scheme.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Gupta revealed that she will head a committee formed to oversee the execution of the Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, with ministers Ashish Sood, Parvesh Verma, and Kapil Mishra as members. Gupta emphasised that the Cabinet had fulfilled a promise outlined in the BJP's "Sankalp Patra" during the Delhi Assembly elections held in February.

"The registration process for applicants will commence immediately through an online portal following thorough discussions on eligibility criteria," said Gupta. She also announced plans to establish "one-stop centres" across all districts aimed at enhancing women's safety, which will offer support services including police assistance and legal counselling.

Delhi CM Rekha Gupta being felicitated during a programme organised to mark International Women's Day at Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

In its election manifesto, the BJP pledged to ensure financial assistance for women from underprivileged families, and the Mahila Samriddhi Yojana is a step towards fulfilling that promise. The government aims to utilise advanced technology to guarantee transparency and efficiency in the disbursement of benefits. An Aadhaar-based electronic KYC (e-KYC) authentication process will be employed to carefully vet applicants for the scheme.

The Delhi government's commitment to supporting women extends beyond financial aid as Gupta underscored her administration's focus on the overall safety and prosperity of women in the capital city. —*PTI*

Need to filter out Cong leaders who work for BJP: RaGa

AHMEDABAD, 8 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has emphasised the need to reevaluate the party's ranks during his recent visit to Gujarat, warning of strict actions, including possible removals, against members allegedly working in tandem with the BJP. Speaking to party workers on the second day of his trip, Gandhi outlined a vision for the future, particularly focusing on the upcoming 2027 assembly elections.

He asserted that the party must distinguish between two groups within its ranks: those devoted to Congress ideology and genuinely engaged with the public, and others who are disconnected and, in some cases, aligned with the BJP. "Until we filter these groups, the people of Gujarat will not believe in us," he stated.

Gandhi acknowledged the struggles faced by various sectors in Gujarat, including the diamond, textile, and ceramic industries, and called on Congress to present a revitalised vision for the state's future. He stressed that the party has not fulfilled the expectations placed upon it over the last three decades, asserting, "We are unable to show Gujarat the way." He underscored the importance of grassroots engagement, urging leaders to connect with the public to understand their needs better. Gandhi noted that a mere increase of 5 per cent in the party's vote share could position Congress to regain power, drawing from the example of Telangana's electoral turnaround. —*PTI*

Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a meeting with party workers in Ahmedabad on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

India-US trade talks: Goyal returns from Washington

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has returned from Washington following a week of trade discussions with US officials. Goyal met with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, focusing on negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

> Prime Minister Narendra Modi please take Parliament into confidence on Trump's 'India cutting trade tariff' claim. Has the government of India taken a decision to cut tariffs under pressure from Prime Minister Modi's close friend Donald Trump?
>
> -Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary

These discussions are particularly significant as India and the US aim to more than double their bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the US. The two nations plan to initiate negotiations for the first phase of this expansive trade agreement by autumn 2025.

US President Donald Trump has claimed that India has agreed to significantly reduce its tariffs, reiterating his assertion that high tariffs hinder American market access. Lutnick has advocated for a comprehensive trade agreement with India, arguing that the nation must include its agriculture sector in negotiations, as it is crucial to discussions with its largest trading partner.

In 2023, US-India bilateral trade in goods and services reached USD 190.08 billion, with India's exports totalling USD 83.77 billion and imports at USD 40.12 billion, resulting in a trade surplus for India of USD 43.65 billion. The services sector also recorded a trade surplus for India of USD 6.47 billion.

The US was India's largest trading partner during 2021-24, contributing USD 67.8 billion in foreign direct investments from April 2000 to September 2024, reinforcing strong economic ties between the two countries. —*PTI*

Araku Coffee should become next Starbucks: Naidu

PRAKASAM, 8 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said that he aspires to see Araku coffee reach the status of a global brand like Starbucks in the future.

While commemorating International Women's Day in Markapuram, Prakasam district, Naidu noted that Araku Coffee, grown by tribal farmers, has already gained international recognition.

"One day, our Araku Coffee should emerge as another Starbucks. It should become an international brand. To achieve this, set up 100 pilot outlets," said Naidu, addressing a large gathering of Women's Day celebrants.

He emphasised that he had found a partner to promote and establish Araku Coffee centres and called for their expansion into every village and major panchayat, encouraging women to take the lead. —*PTI*

Media centers not intended for control, says Fadnavis

MUMBAI, 8 MARCH

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has clarified that the state government's planned Media Monitoring Centre (MMC) is not intended to control the media but rather to facilitate timely responses to news coverage. This announcement comes amid criticism that the initiative aims to exert control over media operations.

Devendra Fadnavis **PHOTO: PTI**

MMC was proposed due to the rapid growth of various publications, television channels, and digital platforms. A government resolution this week indicated that the centre seeks to monitor how news related to government schemes and policies is presented. He said MMC would employ a professional consultant to compile government-related news in PDF format and categorise it by issues, individuals, departments, and sentiment. "We have no intention to control the media but want to take note of what is printed and broadcast, allowing us to respond swiftly if misleading or negative news arises," he said during an informal discussion with female journalists in honour of International Women's Day.

On the subject of a proposed law addressing "love jihad," Fadnavis stated that while interfaith marriages are not inherently problematic, those involving deception or forced conversion warrant legal scrutiny. —*PTI*

PROTEST ON HIGH-SEAS

Congress protest against the Central government's decision to permit offshore mining at the high seas off the shore of Alappuzha, Kerala on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Army Chief warns of China-Pak collusion

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

In a candid discussion at the India Today Conclave, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi acknowledged the "high degree of collusivity" between China and Pakistan, stating that the two-front threat is an undeniable reality. He emphasised the need for vigilance regarding the evolving relationships between Pakistan, China, and neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, particularly in the context of terrorism.

General Dwivedi described the military relationship with Bangladesh as strong, while noting that the potential for terrorism emanating from any collaboration with Pakistan is concerning. He also addressed the Indian Army's preparedness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, asserting that despite any perceived disadvantages, India is well-equipped for the current geopolitical challenges.

Chief General Upendra Dwivedi **PHOTO: PTI**

On the situation along the Line of Control, he reported a significant decrease in terrorist-related incidents, attributing 60 per cent of neutralised terrorists last year to Pakistan. He emphasised the importance of peaceful relations, expressing a commitment to stability. Addressing the role of women in the armed forces, General Dwivedi announced the induction of women into the Territorial Army, promising gradual changes. He also lauded the success of the Agnipath scheme, welcoming high-calibre recruits. The General concluded with a call for coexistence and cooperation to avoid conflict. —*PTI*

BAJRANG DAL STORMS COLLEGE OVER IFTAR PARTY, ALLEGES JIHAD

HARIDWAR, 8 MARCH

Bajrang Dal workers on Saturday stormed the Rishikul Ayurvedic College here in protest against some Muslim students organising an Iftar party on the campus and inviting outsiders to it.

Police placated the right-wing workers, who left but not before creating a ruckus and warning of a more aggressive agitation if no action was taken in the matter within three days.

On Friday, some Muslim students reportedly organised an Iftar party on the college campus.

Bajrang Dal office bearer Amit Kumar alleged that the party had been organised in the "Hindu religious city" as part of a conspiracy to bring outsiders to the college campus.

"Rishikul Ayurvedic College has historical importance. This medical college was established under Rishikul Vidyapeeth, established by Pandit Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya. Students from all over the country come here to get medical education," the Bajrang Dal functionary said. Organising any such event by non-Hindus in Haridwar is prohibited under the Municipal Corporation bylaws, he claimed.

"A conspiracy is being hatched here under Jihad. If the management does not initiate steps for the expulsion of the guilty students within three days, then the Bajrang Dal will be forced to escalate the protest," Kumar warned. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S DAY

Women trailblazers take over PM's social media

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Marking International Women's Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media handles were taken over by a group of extraordinary women who have excelled in diverse fields, from chess to science to rural entrepreneurship and financial empowerment to accessibility and inclusive development.

Each of them shared their journeys, highlighting the power of India's 'Nari Shakti' and the strides being made towards a more inclusive and empowered nation.

Chess grandmaster R Vaishali, farmer-entrepreneur Anita Devi, nuclear scientist Elina Mishra, space scientist Shilpi Soni, accessibility advocate Anjlee Agarwal, and rural entrepreneur Ajaita Shah took over Modi's social media accounts on International Women's Day.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the launch of development works, in Navsari, Gujarat on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, Modi, in his Women's Day message, paid tribute to 'Nari Shakti' and reaffirmed his government's commitment to women empowerment through various schemes and programmes.

He said his government has given topmost priority to women's safety and framed stricter laws and rules to prevent crimes against them, besides making a provision for capital punishment to those indulging in heinous crimes like rape.

Addressing a gathering at Vansi Borsi village in Navsari district, Gujara, Modi said that India is walking on the path of women-led development for rapid progress of the country.

To ensure swift justice in serious crimes against women, the government has set up fast-track courts, he said, adding that around 800 courts have been approved across the country, most of which are now operational.

"The newly-implemented Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which wiped out the colonial law, further strengthened provisions related to women's safety. A separate chapter has been added in it to address crimes against women and children in new criminal laws," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE image

5 inmates found infected with HIV in UP jail

BALLIA, 8 MARCH

Five inmates were found infected with HIV in a health check-up in the Mau district jail, prison officials said on Saturday. Jailor Rajesh Kumar said that all five cases were detected within a week. In the jail of a total of 1095 inmates, testing of others is on. Nine other prisoners in the same jail are HIV infected. The jailor said there is a provision to give special food and medicines to HIV infected prisoners. Meanwhile, District Jail Pharmacist Ajay Kumar Srivastava said that some of the infected prisoners had got tattoos made on their backs and hands at Ballia's Dadri fair and could have received infection from contaminated needles. *—PTI*

Man shot dead, jawan hurt at Indo-Bangla border

SILIGURI, 8 MARCH

An unidentified man was killed and a Border Security Force (BSF) jawan was injured as the protection force thwarted a smuggling bid along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, a spokesperson said. The incident took place in the early hours of Friday near the Khalpara village in Darjeeling district. A group of 15-20 Bangladeshi miscreants allegedly crossed the border illegally who were then joined by miscreants from the Indian side to smuggle cattle and contraband. When spotted by the BSF, all of them then allegedly attacked with sickle, sticks and also pelted stones, he said. The BSF troopers fired non-lethal shot to disperse the attackers but they did not relent and tried to "snatch" the weapon of a jawan. "Sensing a threat to his life, the jawan fired from his rifle and the miscreants fled," the spokesperson said. Two cattle that the miscreants tried to smuggle have been seized. *—PTI*

Pune: 1,400kg of adulterated paneer seized from factory

PUNE, 8 MARCH

Police and the Food and Drug Control Administration (FDCA) raided a factory and seized 1,400 kg of adulterated paneer in Pune, an official said on Saturday. Based on a tip-off, the Pune police's crime branch and a team from the FDCA raided the factory in the Wagholi area, he said. "We seized 1,400 kg of adulterated paneer, 400 kg of glycerol monostearate powder, 1,800 kg of skimmed milk powder, and 718 litres of palm oil during the raid. The samples have been sent to a laboratory for testing," the senior official said. The police are probing the matter further. *—PTI*

ICG and DRI seize Rs 33cr drugs near Chennai

CHENNAI, 8 MARCH

In a significant anti-narcotics operation, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) intercepted a vessel bound for the Maldives, seizing hashish oil valued at approximately Rs 33 crore. On 5 March, the DRI provided intelligence regarding a drug consignment on a tugboat with a barge, travelling from Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu to Male. The ICG acted promptly, diverting two ships to apprehend the suspected vessel south of the Gulf of Mannar. After escorting the vessel and its nine crew members to Tuticorin Harbour for inspection, the DRI confirmed the seized contraband weighed around 30 kg. This operation highlights the ICG's dedication to maritime security and its ongoing battle against transnational crime. Legal proceedings are now underway. *—PTI*

India undercounting heat deaths: ex-WHO scientist

Urges government, health workers to be better prepared

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Former WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said mental health and heat related health issues are often ignored **PHOTO: PTI**

India is "most likely" undercounting heat-related deaths due to a lack of robust data former WHO chief scientist and health ministry advisor Soumya Swaminathan said. In an interview with PTI, she stressed the urgent need for better tracking, preparedness and policy interventions as the country braces for another extreme summer.

"We are most likely undercounting heat releated deaths," she said. "We do not really have a good record of every death in the country.

India experienced brutal heat during last year's summer, recording 536 heatwave days, the highest in 14 years, according to the India Meteorological Department.

Official data showed that India recorded 41,789 suspected heat stroke cases and 143 heat-related deaths during one of its hottest and longest heat waves. Public health experts say the official number of heat deaths is an undercount as 20 to 30 per cent of heat stroke cases usually result in fatalities.

While the health ministry has introduced surveillance for heat-related deaths, Swaminathan cautioned that fatalities represent only "the very tip of the iceberg".

"For every one death, there are probably 20 people who are suffering the impact of heat by high blood pressure or exacerbation of their cardiac disease or heat exhaustion and not being able to go to work," the former director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said.

She added, "Of course we have to minimize deaths. We do not want anyone to die of heat stroke but we also want them to be in thermal comfort."

She also warned of the consequences on mental health. "If you do not get any relief from heat for a prolonged period, then we know, for example, suicides go up, psychiatric illnesses get worse, and domestic violence increases," Swaminathan added.

The former WHO chief scientist called for a coordinated response involving multiple sectors, including labour, housing and urban planning to reduce the impact of heat.

"You need the labour department, industry, factories, workspaces to come in. You need the housing sector to think about heat and especially the low-income housing people who live in tenements with corrugated sheets as roofs. How do we improve the temperature inside those kinds of homes so that people can at least sleep at night?"

Swaminathan urged hospitals, local governments and employers to take proactive measures.

"Prepare your health system, train the health workers. Make sure that you have supplies in your health system," she said.

The IMD has forecast above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures over most parts of the country this summer season too. *—PTI*

AMID PROBE

1,000 Nepalese students return to KIIT university

BHUBANESWAR, 8 MARCH

In the wake of the tragic suicide of a B Tech student, KIIT University has reported that 1,000 out of 1,100 Nepalese students who left the campus due to unrest have returned. This announcement comes as Odisha's Higher Education Minister, Suryabanshi Suraj, revealed that the state government has formed a committee of professors to ensure a conducive academic environment at the university.

The students had initially vacated the campus following the death of 20-year-old Prakriti Lamsal on 16 February, a case that sparked protests among the Nepalese community after allegations of mistreatment by university staff surfaced. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli of Nepal expressed his concerns regarding the handling of students, prompting an apology from KIIT authorities.

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi assured safety for the returning Nepalese students. To assist with this transition, the state government has established a helpdesk and an International Student Facilitation Cell.

The NHRC has initiated an on-site investigation into Prakriti's death and the alleged harassment of Nepalese students, with a report expected by 10 March. Eleven individuals have been arrested for suspected abetment to suicide. *—PTI*

KIIT University said that 1,000 Nepalese students returned to campus after a student's suicide caused agitation in the campus **PHOTO: X**

An 82-year old woman fell in Delhi airport while walking to her gate. She was hospitalised only upon landing **PHOTO: PARUL KANWAR/X**

Wheelchair delayed, 82-yr-old AI flyer falls

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

An 82-year old woman reportedly fell at Delhi airport on 4 March, with her family claiming that the fall was due to Air India not providing requested wheelchair assistance. Air India denied the allegations.

The woman's family claim that she was treated poorly and was not allocated a wheelchair for almost an hour. The incident triggered a massive backlash against the airlines.

In a statement, issued on 8 March, Air India asserted that assistance was available but could not be provided immediately due to peak demand at the time of the request.

The airline stated that the family had approached the Person with Reduced Mobility desk less than 90 minutes before departure, and claimed the assertions of a one-hour wait were unfounded.

Air India maintained that the passenger chose to walk with her companions and subsequently fell. After the incident, Delhi airport's staff, including a doctor, quickly administered first aid, although the family's request for further medical assistance was declined as they opted to continue their travel to Bengaluru. The airline is reportedly in touch with the family for follow-up assistance. *—PTI*

AMU allows students to play Holi on campus

ALIGARH, 8 MARCH

Amid demands for allowing Holi celebration on Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) campus, administration has decided that students can do so "freely" at Non-Resident Students Centre (NRSC) Hall, an official said. A controversy erupted after members of a right-wing group accused the administration of denying permission to Hindu students to organise a "Holi Milan" function on campus and demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention in the matter.

The matter was triggered when student leader, Akhil Kaushal, submitted an application to authorities requesting approval for a special Holi celebration at the NRSC on 9 March. The provost of AMU's NRSC Hall, Professor Brij Bhushan Singh, told reporters that any student of the university can freely play Holi at the hall on 13 and 14 March.

He said there is an AMU board examination on 9 March. *—PTI*

Day 15 of tunnel ops: no sign of workers

NAGARKURNOOL, 8 MARCH

Rescue operation was underway at a brisk pace inside the partially collapsed SLBC project tunnel in Telangana on Saturday as cadaver dogs deployed to locate human presence identified two possible spots.

The cadaver dogs of the Kerala police belonging to the Belgian Malinois breed who can detect smell of humans even from a depth of 15 feet joined the operation on Friday morning with rescue teams taking the canines inside the tunnel.

The rescue personnel have been removing the silt at the locations identified by the dogs.

State Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy, directed officials to take immediate steps to deploy robots for rescue as fragments of the damaged Tunnel Boring Machine posed a danger to the rescue personnel

Eight persons have been trapped in the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel since February 22 and experts from the NDRF, Indian Army, Navy and other agencies are making relentless efforts to pull them out to safety. The rescue operation has been going on amid challenging conditions, including slush water seepage. *—PTI*

Rescue operations at the collapsed SLBC tunnel in Nagarkurnool, Telangana **PHOTO: ANI**

Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn, Tiger Shroff. **PHOTO: X**

SRK, AJAY, TIGER GET NOTICES FOR PAN MASALA AD

JAIPUR, 8 MARCH

Bollywood stars Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn and Tiger Shroff are reportedly in trouble for their 'misleading' advertisements for Vimal.

The complaint allegedly states that the ad misleads consumers by claiming that each grain of the paan masala contains saffron.

The ads' tagline runs, *dane dane mein hai kesar ka dum* (each grain has strength of saffron).

The complaint further accused the actors of "spreading propaganda".

The district consumer disputes redressal forum in Jaipur issued notices to the three actors, and the chairman of Vimal Gutkha brand manufacturer JB Industries, asking them to appear 19 March. *—Agencies*

Villagers dig for treasure at fort after 'Chhava'

BHOPAL, 8 MARCH

Following the recent viewing of the film 'Chhava', which features the historic Asirgarh fort, residents in Madhya Pradesh's Burhanpur district have flocked to the site in search of hidden treasure. Numerous individuals have taken it upon themselves to dig the surrounding fields, spurred on by persistent rumours of buried gold coins.

Burhanpur district collector Harsh Singh confirmed that he is aware of the situation and has ordered a probe into the digging activities. "I have instructed the sub-divisional magistrate to investigate the matter," he stated. Singh also noted that any coins discovered, regardless of their potential value, would be deemed of archaeological importance and classified as government property.

Local resident Waseem Khan reported seeing large groups of fortune-seekers and promptly alerted officials. Videos circulating on social media show crowds armed with torches from their mobile phones, enthusiastically excavating the area. Authorities are working to halt the digging and ensure the preservation of the site's historical integrity. *—PTI*

Court refuses to hear Dutta-Patekar case

MUMBAI, 8 MARCH

A Mumbai court refused to take cognisance of 'MeToo' allegations levelled against veteran actor Nana Patekar by his co-star Tanushree Dutta in 2018 after observing the complaint was filed 'beyond the period of limitation'.

Judicial Magistrate NV Bansal on Friday said that Dutta filed an FIR in 2018 over an incident that allegedly occurred on 23 March, 2008.

In her complaint, Dutta accused Patekar and three others of harassing and misbehaving with her in 2008, while shooting a song on the sets of the film 'Horn Ok Pleasss'. The issue hit national headlines and sparked the #MeToo movement on social media.

Nana Patekar, Tanushree Dutta **PHOTO: X**

The police, in 2019, filed its final report before a magistrate court stating that its probe did not find anything incriminating against any of the accused.

The FIR was found to be false, the police further said in its report.

While Dutta had filed a protest petition seeking further probe into the incident, the Mumbai court said the limitation period of three years had passed. *—PTI*

SMALL WINS

Bihar schools gets pad dispensers, incinerators

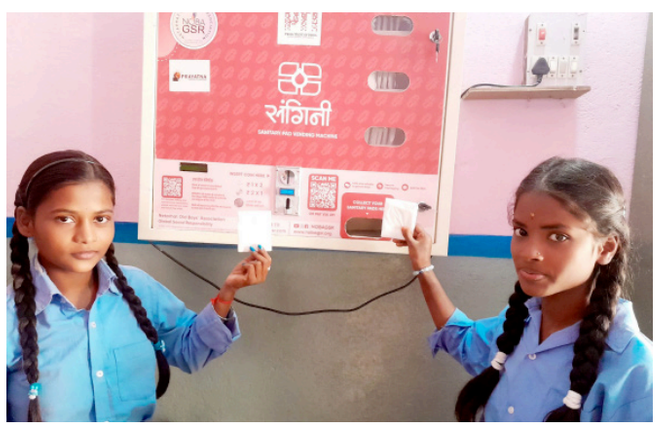
BEGUSARAI, 8 MARCH

To tackle period poverty and empower young girls, sanitary pad dispensers and incinerators were installed in two schools in Manjhaul as part of the Sangini initiative that aims to transform Begusarai into a model district in menstrual hygiene.

With more than 700 installations in schools the initiative has significantly reduced absenteeism and dropout rates among adolescent girls.

Each dispenser is equipped with SIM-enabled technology that allows real-time tracking of stock levels, ensuring timely refills.

"With the support of organisations like PTI, NOBA GSR's Sangini initiative is committed to ensuring that menstrual hygiene products reach those who need them the most. Beyond providing sanitary napkins, we aim to foster a long-term behavioural shift in menstrual health awareness," NOBA GSR Operations Manager Mani Raj Singh said.



As part of the Sangini initiative, sanitary pad dispensers and incinerators were installed in two schools in Bihar **PHOTO: xxx**

This project by non-profit organisation NOBA GSR (Netarhat Old Boys Association Global Social Responsibility), supported by Press Trust of India (PTI), aims to ensure menstrual hygiene management in rural schools so that girls no longer miss out on education due to their periods. The installation took place ahead of International Women's Day.

"Sangini is already operational in 110 government schools across 40 panchayats in Begusarai. We aim to extend this initiative to the remaining panchayats," Saurabh Kumar, NOBA GSR's Begusarai official said.

The initiative is currently active in Bihar, Jharkhand, Telangana and West Bengal, with plans to expand to Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, and others. *—PTI*

SC quashes 2 accused's bail in public exam fraud

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The Supreme Court has quashed an order granting bail to two persons accused of compromising with the sanctity of a public recruitment exam, saying this possibly affected many others who put in earnest effort in the hope of securing a job.

A bench of Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah said that although the accused did not have a criminal record earlier their crimes their acts has cast aspersions on an entire system.

According to the FIR, one person had appeared as a dummy candidate for the other in the Assistant Engineer Civil (Autonomous Governance Department) Competitive Examination-2022 and both had tampered with the admit card and attendance sheet bringing into question about irregularities in the exam.

"Surely there must have been thousands of people who appeared for the exam and the accused, for their own benefit, tried to compromise the sanctity of the exam, possibly affecting so many of those who would have put in earnest effort," the court said

The High court had granted bail citing lack of criminal antecedents which has been struck down by the apex court. *—PTI*

Women in Iran fight for rights as economy flails

Iran is in a deep economic crisis caused by corruption, mismanagement and international sanctions.

In order to collapse Iran's oil exports and put pressure on its currency, President Donald Trump has restored the US's "maximum pressure" campaign since his return to the White House.

"We can clearly feel that we are getting poorer from month to month," said Narges, who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym.

Narges is a 36-year-old artist who lives in Iran's southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan province — one of the country's poorest, despite being rich in resources such as gold, silver, copper and other metals.

The Baloch — a Sunni minority in an otherwise predominantly Shiite country — suffer from drought and water shortages, and have complained for decades about systematic discrimination by the clerical regime in Tehran.

"The current economic crisis has pushed even more families below the poverty line," Narges said.

When resources become scarce, women are the ones who tend to decide how the family money is spent. And they often put their loved ones' needs above their own.

"Working women, especially single mothers, suffer disproportionately. Many of them are in an acute existential crisis," said union activist Simin Yaqoubian to the state news agency IRNA last month.

Despite the increased number of female politicians in the new government, and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian promises to advocate for women's rights, the reality for many women remains harsh.

"What concrete improvements has this brought for women? What legal improvements are there for women, mothers, or single parents?" asked Yaqoubian. "Women are systematically exploited. They work longer hours and earn less."

The economic participation of women in Iran is among the lowest in the world. According to TheGlobalEconomy.com the female labor force participation rate in 2023 was only 14.38 per cent — far behind that of countries like Saudi Arabia or Oman, where it nearly double at about 30 per cent.

In addition to economic hardship, state pressure on activists and civil society organizations, especially women's rights activists, is also growing.

Marzieh Mohebi, a lawyer who founded the NGO Sora Women Lawyers Association, which aided incarcerated women and victims of violence and poverty, fled Iran for her safety and now lives in exile in France. Mohebi told DW that she was prouder of her association than anything else in her life.

"Over 250 female lawyers were active. We offered hope to many women. Initially, we were even praised by the authorities."

However, her organization's work came to an abrupt end when it came under government scrutiny.

"We were accused of spreading feminism. " said Mohebi.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women in Iran have been required to cover their hair in public.

But an increasing number of them choose not to wear hijabs, especially since the 2022 death in police custody of Iranian-Kurdish woman Jina Mahsa Amini.

The 22-year-old had been arrested by Iran's "morality police" for allegedly violating the country's strict dress code.

Amini's death triggered nationwide protests largely led by women and schoolgirls, calling for political change. It also inspired the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, which quickly became a symbol of resistance against the compulsory hijab and systematic discrimination.

Many young women were arrested, including several of Mohebi's colleagues.

"The authorities wanted to control the work of our association," Mohebi explained. "I refused and dissolved the association."

Mohebi is convinced that her work has not been in vain. The lawyer said she and her colleagues have made important contributions with their educational work, whose effects will unfold in the long term.

Her colleagues continue to work for women's rights to this day. *—DW News*

Following the death of Iranian-Kurdish woman Jina Mahsa Amini in custody in 2022, many Iranian women began rebelling against the hijab **PHOTO: PTI**

HOW DID THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING WOMEN'S DAY BEGIN?

International Working Women's Day traces its roots to the struggles of women workers in the early 20th century, particularly following the Industrial Revolution. In New York, garment workers, predominantly women, mobilised for better wages and working conditions. At the time, the garment industry was the largest employer of women, but they faced poor working conditions, long hours, and meagre wages. Many were subcontracted and worked as "learners," earning less than semi-skilled male workers.

Work hours stretched to 75 hours a week, and workers were fined for tardiness and even locked inside workshops to prevent breaks. This exploitation led to the 1909 New York Shirtwaist Strike, also known as the Uprising of the 20,000. Led by Clara Lemlich and supported by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, the strike called for better wages and conditions, with the slogan "Bread and Roses" symbolising both economic and political demands, including voting rights for women.

The strike sparked nationwide demonstrations, marking the first "Woman's Day." Inspired by this, the Second International Congress of Socialist Women in Copenhagen, Denmark, officially designated 19 March, 1911, as International Women's Day.

In 1913, the date was moved to 8 March, in line with the Georgian calendar, which is now celebrated worldwide.

SALAR

Women in aviation sector: Fighting odds to fly high

- Three women from different corners of the country share their inspiring journeys to the aviation sector on women's day

One left her 1.5-month-old child at home to pursue her dream job that would one day make the infant's future bright. Another came from a remote village and became the first pilot of her state. The third one handled operations at the New Delhi airport during the tough times of the Charkhi-Dadri mid-air collision and the IC-814 hijacking.

These three women, although different by their place of birth and way of upbringing, shared a common goal of breaking the stereotype and making their mark in the country's aviation sector.

On this International Women's Day, they narrated their life stories to PTI.

Barnali Vishwakarma

Barnali Vishwakarma is an executive at Airport Operations Control Staff (AOCS), an airline department that manages passenger travel, security, and flight operations.

Her career in the aviation sector began with nearly eight years of experience at the Kolkata airport before the pandemic disrupted lives and forced her out of the workforce for three years.

During that time, she welcomed her baby boy and focused on recovering from postpartum challenges. However, when the opportunity arose to rejoin IndiGo at her hometown station, she seized it without hesitation.

"It was a tough choice to make... leaving a one-and-a-half-month-old baby at home to go to the office," she said. "First training, then long working hours... Above all the emotional struggle of being away from the baby," she added.

"But I knew one day this would secure a brighter future for my child," said Vishwakarma.

Juhie Chettri

If Vishwakarma's story is an example of how women can balance motherhood and ambition, in Captain Juhie Chettri's case, it was bridging the gap between her village in Sikkim and the sky.

"Growing up, flying as a profession seemed like a far-fetched dream for the children in my region, primarily due to a lack of resources and information about how to enter the aviation field," she said.

At that time, Chettri had never imagined that she would become the first pilot from Sikkim and would later get felicitated with one of the state's most prestigious honours, the State Award, in 2017.

Celebrating 13 years in the industry this year, Chhetri now manages up to 80 pilots while also training them.

Nivedita Dubey

The story of Nivedita Dubey is completely different. She was the airport manager of Indira Gandhi International Airport during the Charkhi-Dadri mid-air collision of two planes near Delhi in 1996 or the infamous hijacking of the IC-814 flight three years later.

Dubey became the first woman to become the Airport Authority of India's (AAI) first regional executive director (RED) of the eastern region in 2023 and is posted at the regional headquarters in Kolkata.

Over the years, Dubey also transitioned into human resource management, where she had key responsibilities in manpower planning, recruitment, training, and industrial relations.

"Early on in my career, I faced critical challenges, managing aircraft emergencies, including the Charkhi-Dadri mid-air collision and the IC 814 hijacking. These experiences shaped my ability to stay composed under pressure and make swift, strategic decisions," Dubey said.

Dubey also claimed she handled the emergency control room during both crises.

"I was very new in the profession but I handled all the pressure. It was tough to keep track of all the lists of bodies recovered and other details," she said with pride. "With so many coffins in front, it used to be scary at times," she added.

Her advice to young women aspiring to make successful careers is to build strong support systems and robust networks and dream big.

"We women can understand each other's problems better than men can," she noted. "Invest in yourself, keep building on your abilities, and keep learning. I have continued to learn till date," Dubey added. *—PTI*

Women pilots highlighted the importance of entering male-dominated fields **PHOTO: PTI**

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Filmmakers hope industry moves past gender, pay gap still a concern

It's high time the film industry stops categorising filmmakers based on gender and ensures that women are no longer denied pay parity, directors and actors said this International Women's Day.

Shonali Bose, who has directed films such as 'Margarita With a Straw' and 'The Sky is Pink', says it is irritating to be asked about women's issues as a "woman filmmaker".

"You are always asked, *As a woman filmmaker, what do you feel?* and I'm like, *I'm a filmmaker*. Please don't say I'm a female filmmaker. You should not always have to represent your gender. In our cinema, what we would want is to look past the gender. A woman can do anything that men do," Bose told PTI.

Producer Rangita Pritish Nandy, known for creating the web series 'Four More Shots Please!' and 'Ziddi Girls', agrees.

"We need to pass the gender conversation and just go by skill." Nandy told PTI.

Women characters inhabiting the fiction space have evolved and it is for good, said veteran cinema star Shabana Azmi, known for her powerful performances in her five decade-long career.

"For far too long, women really have been invisible or they have been shown just to glamourise the place and to be the good-looking girl and all that. Women are much more interesting than that. And I feel that space is definitely opening up" the actor told PTI.

Pay parity continues to be a concern for many actors like Bollywood stars Madhuri Dixit, Madhoo, and Dia Mirza, who believe that women have to constantly prove themselves when it comes to equal pay.

"To say that we are equal and we can draw an audience, but you have to prove it every single time. And yes, there is still a disparity. It's like pushing the envelope every time, a little bit more, it's like baby steps," Dixit said ahead of the 2025 IIFA Weekend in Jaipur.

In the 1990s, safety and pay parity for women in the film industry were not even part of the conversation, said "Roja" star Madhoo.

"There was blind acceptance to how things were, and that was the mindset then. But the fact is that it is not like that anymore; there is a conversation, a fight. The girls today are amazing flag bearers because of whom the conversation has started. Even an older generation has the power to say *no, I'll not accept this, this is what I want*. The new generation is coming with an open, equal space mindset, which is great," she told PTI.

Guneet Monga, Shonali Bose and Madhuri Dixit **PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/WIKIPEDIA/ANI**

Two-time Oscar winning producer Guneet Monga, who joined Dixit on the panel at 2025 IIFA in Jaipur, said people need to take more chances on women artists.

"There is clearly a pay gap, there is clearly a difference and women have to do it 10 times to be doing it once. It's hard, but I want male actors to answer this question. The onus of answering these questions on women is strange because we're the people who are at the receiving end" Monga said.

There's still "a lot of work to be done" when it comes to the question of pay parity, added Mirza.

"But I really feel that women in storytelling can really steer the way perceptions are built and societies are reshaped because it is a powerful instrument of social awareness that can drive some serious action," she told PTI.

Today, women actors are playing diverse roles, added South superstar Jyotika, who has worked with Azmi in the recently released web series 'Dabba Cartel'.

"We are also making our mark in the bigger male-led films and I think now there is more prominence and more stories are being told. That's absolute growth. And of course, we are being cast in all the languages and we are just moving out from our comfort spaces and everyone's looking towards growth," she told PTI.

There continues to be "sexualisation and objectification" of women on screen, pointed out Mirza.

"As women in cinema, we're constantly kind of trying to rise and go beyond that and seeing we are much more than that. Even though there is a lot of effort and work being done by women and men to change the way we are writing characters for women, we have a long way to go," she added.

Filmmaker Sudhanshu Saria, who has directed films such as 'Ulajh' and 'Sanaa', said the on-screen representation of women has evolved, but more can be done.

"We must keep mining our understanding of the female experience and commit to portraying it in surprising and authentic ways. We have to stop assigning cliched behaviour patterns to characters simply because they are women.

"Women can be mothers, wives, and girlfriends, but they can also be entrepreneurs, thieves, murderers and psychopaths. We just have to approach characters with respect and curiosity and allow them to be well-drawn and unique," Saria told PTI.

Actor-producer Harman Baweja, who recently backed the critically-acclaimed film 'Mrs', said a lot has been done in terms of how women are represented in films but the road is still quite long.

"We have taken a considerable amount of steps, and I'm sure we will continue to evolve, but we also need to evolve our mindsets, which is equally important, if not more," he told PTI.

Bengali cinema star Paoli Dam credits the opening up of streaming space for changing the narrative around women.

"OTT has played an important part in changing the narrative of cinema. In OTT, since they're exploring more with the content, the way women are being shown now is unapologetic. They don't need to be guilty to say something, and they can have their standpoint and say no," Dam said. *—PTI*

Indian community leader gets 40 yrs for rape in Aus

SYDNEY, 8 MARCH

An Indian community leader in Australia has been sentenced to 40 years in prison, with a non-parole period of 30 years, for the "premeditated and elaborately executed" rapes of five Korean women, as reported by local media.

Balesh Dhankhar, 43, displayed no emotion as he was sentenced at the Downing Centre District Court on Friday. He lured women through fake job advertisements and subsequently drugged them at or near his Sydney home. The former IT consultant was found to have groped and raped the victims while also filming his crimes for personal gratification.

All five women, aged between 21 and 27, were either unconscious or significantly impaired during the attacks.

Until his arrest in 2018, he was a well-regarded member of the Indian-Australian community, having previously founded a satellite group of the Bharatiya Janata Party and served as a spokesman for the Hindu Council of Australia. *—PTI*

France starts military withdrawal from Senegal

DAKAR, 8 MARCH

France has commenced the withdrawal of its military presence in Senegal, officially transferring control of two military facilities to the Senegalese government. The handover occurred on 7 March, 2025, following Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's announcement that all foreign troops must leave the country. The French Embassy confirmed the transfer of the Maréchal and Saint-Exupéry districts, which have been ready for return since summer 2024.

This move is part of France's broader strategy to reduce its military footprint in West Africa, a region witnessing increasing opposition to perceived colonial legacies. In recent months, France has faced challenges in retaining its military engagements in countries like Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso. *—PTI*

Pak asks Afghan citizen card holders to leave by 31 March

ISLAMABAD, 8 MARCH

The Pakistan government has announced a deadline of 31 March, 2025, for holders of Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs) to voluntarily leave the country. This move is part of a broader plan to repatriate illegal foreign nationals. A leaked government document reveals that ACC holders residing in Islamabad and Rawalpindi will be relocated back to Afghanistan, affecting over 800,000 documented refugees. The Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Programme (IFRP) has been in effect since November 2023. Officials have assured that the repatriation process will be conducted humanely, providing food and healthcare for returnees. *—PTI*

Myanmar to hold general elections soon

BANGKOK, 8 MARCH

Four years after seizing power from the elected administration, the head of the military government declared Myanmar will hold a general election within 10 months, state-run media reported Saturday. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said Friday the election will take place either in December or January 2026 at the latest, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper. He announced the dates in a press conference while on an official visit to Belarus, one of the few allies of Myanmar's military government, saying that 53 political parties have already submitted their lists to participate in the election. The announcement comes as Myanmar is roiled by a civil war in which the army has been forced onto the defensive against pro-democracy militants as well as ethnic militias seeking autonomy in much of the country. *—PTI*

The lawsuit calls the mass firings illegal, causing economic harm

20 states sue Trump admin over firing of federal workers

ANNAPOLIS, 8 MARCH

Maryland and 19 other states are suing multiple federal agencies, contending President Donald Trump's administration has illegally fired thousands of federal probationary workers.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown is leading the coalition of attorneys general in the federal lawsuit that was filed late Thursday in Maryland, where the state estimates about 10 per cent of households receive wages from the federal government.

"The draconian actions of the Trump-Vance Administration could lead to tens of thousands of jobs lost, hundreds of thousands of lives disrupted, and the cratering of tens of millions of dollars in income here in Maryland," Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, said in support of the complaint.

Brown followed up by moving for a temporary restraining order in federal court in Maryland seeking to stop any more firings of federal probationary employees and to reinstate those who have already been dismissed.

The mass firings will cause irreparable burdens and expenses on the states, the lawsuit said, because states will have to support recently unemployed workers and review and adjudicate claims of unemployment assistance. More than 800 fired federal workers in Maryland already have applied for unemployment benefits, Brown's office said.

The lawsuit also called the mass firings illegal, causing economic harm.

"President Trump's unlawful mass firings of federal workers are a blatant attack on the civil service, throwing thousands of hardworking families into financial turmoil," Brown, a Democrat, said in a news release.

The other states that have joined the lawsuit are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia also is a plaintiff. *—PTI*

EPA sets new spending rules under DOGE

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has introduced new regulations requiring that any spending item exceeding £50,000 must receive approval from Department of Government Efficiency. Under the directive, EPA staff must submit a one-page summary of each funding action daily between 3pm and 6pm Eastern Time, along with other required forms.

Trump admin cancels $400M in Columbia grants

The Trump administration has announced a USD400 million funding cut to Columbia University, citing its insufficient action against antisemitism on campus. This follows scrutiny of the university's contracts and grant eligibility. The move has sparked a debate over free speech and advocacy, particularly regarding criticism of Israel and support for Palestinian rights.

Trump sues Capital One over account closures

A lawsuit has been filed by the Donald J Trump Revocable Trust and Eric Trump against Capital One, alleging the bank unjustly terminated over 300 accounts belonging to the Trump Organisation.It claims the closures, made following the 6 January Capitol attack, were politically motivated. Capital One asserted that account closures are not politically driven.

Georgia bill allows Trump to recover legal costs

Georgia's Senate has unanimously passed a bill permitting Donald Trump and others to seek compensation for legal expenses incurred during the attempts to overturn the 2020 election results. It enables reimbursement from counties if district attorney disqualifications lead to case dismissals. This comes after he, 18 co-defendants faced charges in Fulton County.

Trump revises student loan forgiveness rules

Donald Trump has issued an executive order modifying the Public Service Loan Forgiveness programme disqualifying nonprofit workers linked to "improper" activities, including illegal immigration and foreign terrorist groups. It forgives a portion of the student loan held by people who work in the government and certain nonprofit jobs for a decade.

Everything okay between Musk, Rubio: Trump

US President Donald Trump rejected media reports that suggested there is a fight between Elon Musk and US officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"No clash, I was there, you're just a troublemaker," he told a reporter at the White House who was asking about the reports. "Elon gets along great with Marco and they're both doing a fantastic job," he said.

The New York Times reported that a meeting Thursday between Musk and top officials revealed significant tensions about the scale and methods of government staff reductions.

Musk, spearheading the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), clashed with Cabinet members, including Rubio and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, about his aggressive approach to cutting federal jobs, the newspaper wrote.

The meeting highlighted disagreements about Musk's "hacksaw" methods, with officials expressing frustration with the lack of coordination and potential consequences.

Rubio confronted Musk about targeting the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and questioned the validity of his claim that the State Department is not downsizing staff, citing early retirement buyouts.

Musk dismissed Rubio's concerns, accusing him of being "good on TV" but ineffective. *—Agencies*

China imposes retaliatory tariffs on Canadian imports

BEIJING, 8 MARCH

China announced on Saturday that it will impose retaliatory tariffs on certain Canadian agricultural and food imports, following Canada's tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and metal products last October. The new duties, effective from 20 March, will see an additional 100 per cent tariff on Canadian rapeseed oil, oil cakes, and peas, while pork and aquatic products will be subject to a 25 per cent tariff.

These developments heighten existing global trade tensions, as countries including

PHOTO: X

the United States, China, Canada, and Mexico have enacted numerous tariff measures.

The duties come in retaliation for Ottawa imposing tariffs against Chinese imports in October, including a 100 per cent surtax on all Chinese-made EVs and 25 per cent on steel and aluminum imports.

"Despite China's repeated opposition and dissuasion, Canada has taken unilateral restrictive measures on electric vehicles, steel, aluminum and other products imported from China without investigation, undermining China-Canada economic and trade relations," read the statement by the customs authorities.

This follows an anti-discrimination probe that determined that Canada's tariffs have disrupted normal trade and harmed the rights of Chinese enterprises. *—PTI*

Fighting continues as Syria's Prez calls on Alawite to disarm

DAMASCUS, 8 MARCH

Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa has urged the Alawite minority to surrender after intense fighting with the Syrian security forces.

Hasan Abdel-Ghani, spokesperson for the Syrian Defence Ministry, said that fighters loyal to former president Bashar al-Assad attacked security forces in several places in Latakia and Tartous governorates, home to the Alawite minority sect to which the al-Assad family belongs, killing "a number of security forces" in well-planned operations. *—Agencies*

Houthis warn Israel of attacks over Gaza blockade

GAZA, 8 MARCH

Yemen's Houthi fighters have given Israel a four-day deadline to lift its blockade on food, medicine and aid into Gaza, threatening to resume "naval operations" against the country otherwise.

The ultimatum, issued late on Friday, signals a possible escalation from the rebel group after their assaults tailed off in January following a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

"We give the entire world notice: We are granting a four-day deadline," the group's leader, Abdel-Malik al-Houthi, said in a video statement.

PHOTO X

Meanwhile, foreign ministers from Muslim nations on Saturday rejected calls by US President Donald Trump to empty the Gaza Strip of its Palestinian population and backed a plan for an administrative committee of Palestinians to govern the territory to allow reconstruction to go ahead. *—Agencies*

Impeached South Korean Prez Yoon released from jail

SEOUL, 8 MARCH

South Korea's impeached conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol was released from prison on Saturday, a day after a Seoul court cancelled his arrest to allow him to stand trial for rebellion without being detained.

TV footage showed Yoon waving his hand, clenching his fists and bowing deeply to his supporters who were shouting his name and waving South Korean and US national flags. He climbed into a black van to travel to his presidential residence in Seoul.

He thanked his supporters and asked those who are on hunger strike against his impeachment to end it.

Yoon was arrested and indicted by prosecutors in January over his 3 December martial law decree that plunged the country into huge political turmoil. *—PTI*

14 killed in overnight attacks in Ukraine

DONETSK, 8 MARCH

Ukraine's emergency service said on Saturday that Russian forces hit the town of Dobropillia in the eastern Donetsk region on Friday night, killing 11 people and wounding 30.

Recommended Stories

Emergency services added that eight five-storey apartment buildings, an administrative building, and 30 cars were damaged.

At least three people were killed and seven injured after

Firefighters put out the fire following a Russian rocket attack in Dobropillya, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

a Russian drone attack on a civilian building in Bogodukhiv, Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, the governor of Kharkiv, Oleh Synehubov, wrote on Telegram.

In Odesa, a drone attack resulted in several fires, which affected a hangar with agricultural equipment, a service station building, an auto parts store, solar panels held in an open area and a four-storey industrial building.

At the same time, Alexander Drozdenko, governor of the Leningrad region, said on Saturday that a tank at the Kirishi refinery, one of Russia's largest, was damaged by falling debris after a Ukrainian drone was shot down. *—Agencies*

NORTH KOREA UNVEILS NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINE

PHOTO: X

SEOUL, 8 MARCH

North Korea has unveiled for the first time a nuclear-powered submarine currently under construction, posing a significant security threat to South Korea and the United States. State media reported that Kim Jong Un visited major shipyards, showcasing what is termed a "nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine."

Experts suggest the vessel may be of 6,000 to 7,000 tons, capable of carrying approximately ten nuclear-capable missiles. Moon Keun-sik, a submarine expert at Hanyang University, expressed the seriousness of this development for regional The country's existing fleet primarily consists of outdated diesel-powered submarines. *—PTI*

'NATURAL CAUSES'

Hackman died of heart disease, wife of Hantavirus

SANTA FE, 8 MARCH

Acclaimed actor **Gene Hackman** has died from heart disease, a week after his wife, **Betsy Arakawa**, succumbed to Hantavirus in their New Mexico home. Authorities revealed that Hackman likely remained unaware of her passing due to his advanced Alzheimer's disease.

The state's chief medical examiner, Dr Heather Jarrell, stated that Hackman, 95, displayed signs of severe Alzheimer's and significant heart disease, which ultimately led to his demise on 18 February. Both deaths were classified as natural causes.

Arakawa, aged 65, was last seen on 11February during a shopping trip. Her body was found in a bathroom, linked to

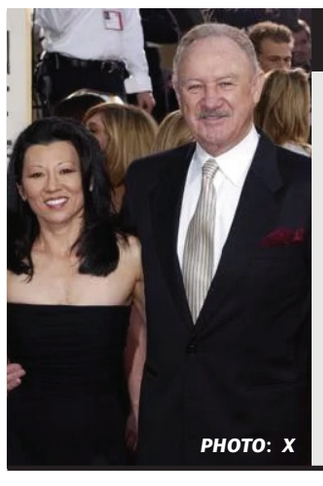
PHOTO: X

WHAT IS HANTAVIRUS?

- Virus Type: RNA virus from Bunyaviridae family.

TRANSMISSION:
- Rodent urine, droppings, saliva (not human-to-human in most cases).
- Inhalation of aerosolised virus particles from contaminated surfaces.
- High-risk areas: Farms, forests, rural homes.

SYMPTOMS:
- Fever, muscle aches, fatigue.
- Shortness of breath, coughing, fluid in lungs.

SEVERITY
- Can be fatal if untreated; mortality rate of HPS is ~38%.

PREVENTION:
- Rodent control (seal entry points, keep areas clean).
- Avoid sweeping rodent droppings (use wet cleaning methods).
- Wear protective gear when handling rodent waste.
- No specific cure: Treatment is supportive care (oxygen therapy, fluids, ICU support).

hantavirus pulmonary syndrome.

Hackman was discovered in the home's entrance, exhibiting signs of decomposition due to the dry climate of Santa Fe. One of the couple's three dogs was also found deceased, while two others survived.

Hackman retired from acting in the early 2000s. *—PTI*

Suzuki ties up with Hero FinCorp for vehicle loans

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Saturday said it has joined hands with Hero FinCorp for vehicle finance. As per the MoU inked between the entities, the partnership will leverage the automaker's wide-reaching network and Hero FinCorp's tailored financial solutions for new and pre-owned car loans. With this tie-up, MSI today has over 40 retail finance partners for customers to choose from, giving them a wide array of finance options to suit their varied needs, he added. "This partnership with Maruti Suzuki takes us a step further towards making car ownership easier, more accessible, and truly hassle-free for every Indian," Hero FinCorp MD & CEO Abhimanyu Munjal said. *—PTI*

Shiv Nadar gifts 47% of his stake to his daughter

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Billionaire Shiv Nadar, founder of HCL, has gifted 47 per cent of his stake in HCL Corp and Vama Delhi to his daughter Roshni Nadar Malhotra as part of a strategic succession plan. After the transfer, Malhotra will acquire control and become a majority shareholder of Vama Delhi and HCL Corp, HCLTech said in a stock exchange filing. HCL Infosystems Ltd also made a similar filing. By virtue of her stakes in Vama Delhi and HCL Corp, she will become the largest shareholder of HCL Infosystems Ltd and HCL Tech. She will also acquire control over the voting rights in relation to the 12.94 per cent stake held by Vama Delhi and 49.94 per cent held by HCL Corp in HCL Infosystems. In HCL Tech, she will acquire a 44.17 per cent stake held by Vama Delhi and a 0.17 per cent stake from HCL Corp. *—PTI*

FPIs withdraw Rs 24,753 cr in first week of March

FPI outflow so far in 2025 is at Rs 1.37 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Foreign investors continue to pull money out of Indian stock markets, with net selling by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) reaching Rs 24,753 crore in the first week of March, according to data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

The latest outflows add to the heavy selling trend observed this year, bringing the total net FPI outflows in 2025 to Rs 1,37,354 crore. The sustained selling pressure has raised concerns about market stability, as foreign investors remain cautious about India's economic and corporate performance.

The primary reasons for this persistent selling include weak earnings from Indian companies, slower-than-expected GDP growth, and a sharp rise in the U.S. Dollar Index. A stronger dollar makes emerging market investments less attractive, leading to capital outflows from countries like India.

Many foreign investors believe that Indian stocks are overvalued compared to other emerging markets, **PHOTO: X**

Valuation concerns have also contributed to the FPI exodus.

Many foreign investors believe that Indian stocks are overvalued compared to other emerging markets, prompting them to shift funds to markets with better growth potential and lower risks.

Last month in February the foreign investors sold equities worth Rs 34,574 crore.

The ongoing FPI outflows have impacted market stability, contributing to volatility in Indian equities.

In January the FPIs withdrew Rs 78,027 crore from the Indian stock market.

- The primary reasons for this persistent selling include weak earnings from Indian companies, slower-than-expected GDP growth, and a sharp rise in the Dollar Index. A stronger dollar makes emerging market investments less attractive, leading to capital outflows

Last year in December the net investment by FPIs in Indian equities stood positive, with a net investment of Rs 15,446 crore.

The year 2024 marked a positive ending, but the net buying value in Indian equities by FPIs drastically reduced, declining to Rs 427 crore.

The country experienced a drastic drop in Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) inflows in 2024, with net investments falling by 99 per cent compared to the previous year. *—ANI*

FRESH WOES

SpiceJet's lessors, ex-pilot file insolvency pleas

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

SpiceJet is facing fresh round of troubles as three Ireland-based aircraft lessors and a former pilot have filed insolvency pleas in NCLT against the budget carrier, claiming defaults.

Three lessors - NGF Alpha, NGF Genesis and NGF Charlie- have filed petitions under Section 9 of IBC, seeking initiation of insolvency proceedings against SpiceJet claiming dues totalling USD 12.68 million (about Rs 110 crore).

SpiceJet, during the proceedings of the National Company Law Tribunal, earlier this week, sought some time to resolve the matter as settlement talks were going on.

The insolvency tribunal directed to list all three petitions on April 7, 2025, for the next hearing.

The lessors had earlier leased five Boeing 737 to SpiceJet. They had served legal notice to SpiceJet wherein they alleged theft of parts of the aircraft, including engines and using them in other planes.

Besides, regarding the plea filed by the pilot, the two-member NCLT bench asked whether claims by the pilot are barred under Section 10A of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

This was a special provision inserted by the government in IBC to help companies after economic activities had resumed post-lockdown in phases.

Debt-ridden SpiceJet is already facing several cases before the NCLT from lessors, vendors and other operational creditors, though no final order has been passed in any case.

In September 2024, SpiceJet raised Rs 3,000 crore through sale of shares to qualified institutional buyers, which it intended to use for settling liabilities of creditors, including aircraft and engine lessors, engineering vendors and financiers. *—PTI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Nifty valuations steady, HSBC bullish on India

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

After the recent market correction, Nifty's valuations have returned to levels that align with its 5-year and 10-year averages, according to a report by HSBC Mutual Fund.

Despite short-term challenges, the report maintained a positive outlook on Indian equities, citing a strong medium-term growth potential.

It said "Nifty valuations are now in-line with its 5/10-year average. We remain constructive on Indian equities supported by the more robust medium term growth outlook".

The government's continued focus on infrastructure and manufacturing investments is likely to drive economic growth. Additionally, private sector investments are expected to pick up, further boosting economic activity.

The report also stated Nifty consensus EPS estimate for CY25 have been cut by about 2 per cent (YoY) in February with the conclusion of the earnings season.

However, due to the sharp market correction valuations have moderated further. Nifty now trades on 18.1x 1-year forward PE. This is now a 7 per cent discount to its 5-year average and in-line with its 10-year average.

Overall, while short-term uncertainties exist, HSBC Mutual Fund believes that India's long-term growth story remains intact. Strong policy support, increasing private sector participation, and structural improvements in key industries are expected to keep the country on a steady growth path. *—ANI*

India must withdraw from all US negotiations: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

India should withdraw from all negotiations with the US and prepare to engage with the Trump administration in the same way as countries like China and Canada are doing, economic think tank GTRI said on Saturday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder, Ajay Srivastava said the US is exerting heavy pressure on India to accept trade demands that largely favour American interests.

US President Donald Trump and his officials have criticized India mostly by using incorrect data, he said.

PHOTO:ANI

Against US tariffs, China and Canada have announced retaliatory measures.

On Friday, Trump claimed that India had agreed to cut tariffs on American imports after his administration "exposed" what he called unfair trade practices.

According to a GTRI report, a comprehensive trade deal would open the door to US demands, not just on tariff reductions, but also on government procurement, agricultural subsidies, patent laws, and unrestricted data flows, all of which India has consistently opposed.

Citing an example, it said Australia's domestic car industry collapsed after it reduced car import tariffs from 45 per cent to 5 per cent in the late 1980s.

India exported less than USD 13 million worth of passenger cars to the US and if America increases tariffs on India cars, India will have no impact, it said.

If US rejects 'Zero-for-Zero' offer and imposes reciprocal tariffs, India should respond only if necessary, as trade data suggests that accurately calculated reciprocal tariffs will not hurt most industry sectors, he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sitharaman urges banks to adapt, lead & innovate

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the banking sector must continue to innovate and lead amid changing global landscape, and exuded confidence that the country's largest bank SBI will embrace technology, sustainability and inclusivity as its guiding principles. Speaking at the launch of Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Foundation Day of State Bank of India (SBI), the minister also said SBI has continuously evolved to meet the changing landscape and retained its position as a market leader despite regulatory tightening. She said SBI is reinventing its personal distribution channels to align with evolving customer expectations. Sitharaman said SBI, , is now ideally positioned to deliver superior value creation. *—PTI*

India's food inflation may drop below 5% in Feb: Union Bank

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The food inflation in India likely fell below 5 per cent for the first time since June 2023, says a report by Union Bank of India.

The report also noted that the India's overall retail inflation is expected to have slowed down further in February 2025, falling below the 4 per cent mark, primarily due to a decline in vegetable prices.

It said "Food inflation has probably come below the 5 per cent levels for the first time after June'23".

The report estimated that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation dropped to 3.94 per cent in February, compared to 4.31 per cent in January 2025.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

It said "India CPI likely slowed down further to 3.94 per cent in Feb'25 as against 4.31 per cent in January'25 on account of further easing in vegetable prices, especially OPT (onion, potato & tomato)".

Food inflation, a major component of retail inflation, is estimated to have fallen further to 4.66 per cent in February 2025, marking a significant decline. This is the first time since June 2023 that food inflation has likely dropped below the 5 per cent level.

The latest estimates indicate that India's inflation trajectory is on a downward trend, bringing relief to consumers and policymakers. *—ANI*

PHOTO:PIXABAY

Indian firms need Rs 120 L cr debt by FY30: Crisil

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The corporate in India will need to raise about Rs 115-125 lakh crore in debt between FY26 and FY30 to fund capital expenditure (capex), working capital, and the financing needs of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), according to a report by Crisil.

The report highlighted that around Rs 45-50 lakh crore of this debt will be required for capital expenditure, while the remaining Rs 70-75 lakh crore will be used by NBFCs and for meeting working capital requirements.

On the funding side, India's overall financing ecosystem, which includes banks, the corporate bond market, and external commercial borrowings (ECBs), is expected to grow at a moderate pace of 10% annually until FY30.

With India's ongoing push for infrastructure development and the improving financial health of corporates, sustained policy support and diversified funding sources will be crucial in meeting the country's investment needs over next five years. *—ANI*

India's space sector poised to reach $44B: Jitendra Singh

Jitendra Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Addressing the 'Space-Tech for Good Governance' Conclave organized by the Indian Institute of Democratic Leadership, Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh projected the space sector to surge to USD 44 billion in the near future, marking a nearly five-fold growth.

According to the Ministry of Science & Technology, Dr Singh pointed to the National Space Innovation and Applications (NSIL) and In-SPACe, which have fostered collaboration between government and non-government entities, driving India's space economy to USD 8 billion.

- The number of startups has grown from one to more than 300, positioning India as a key revenue generator in the global space market

Addressing India's growing stature in global space exploration, Dr Jitendra Singh remarked, "Gone are the days when we used to take the lead from others. Now, India sets the cue for others to follow."

The number of startups has grown from one to more than 300, positioning India as a key revenue generator in the global space market. India has launched 433 foreign satellites, 396 of which have been launched since 2014 under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, generating USD 192 million and Euro 272 million in revenue.

Four astronauts have been identified for the mission, with one already invited by the US to visit the International Space Station. By 2035, India aims to establish the Bharat Antariksh Station, and Dr Singh boldly declared India's goal to send its first astronaut to the Moon by 2040.

Dr Jitendra Singh proudly noted that India's neighbouring countries increasingly depend on India's satellite systems, further strengthening India's position as a regional space leader. *—ANI*

Infibeam's UAE subsidiary rejigged ahead of listing

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Fintech firm Infibeam Avenues Ltd's UAE subsidiary has reorganised its shareholding structure ahead of its listing to amplify digital payment strategy, it said in a stock exchange filing. The reorganisation involves transferring the mirror shareholding in Avenues World FZ-LLC to its newly incorporated Abu Dhabi entity, Infibeam Avenues ME SPV Ltd. As per the stock exchange filing of Thursday, Infibeam Avenues' wholly-owned UAE subsidiary, Vavian International Ltd, will hold an 80 per cent stake in the newly-formed Infibeam Avenues ME SPV Ltd. This entity will, in turn, own Avenues World FZ-LLC, the operator behind the widely recognized CCAvenue.ae payment gateway in the UAE. *—PTI*

HAPPY WOMEN'S DAY

Adani hopes granddaughters face open doors, not glass ceilings

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Billionaire Gautam Adani penned an emotional tribute on International Women's Day, saying women in leadership roles are not just welcome but essential as their talents and insights are invaluable resources that cannot be squandered.

In a LinkedIn post titled 'From Banaskantha to Boardrooms: The Women Who Shaped My World', the Adani Group chairman advised men in positions of influence to view gender equity not as a women's issue but as a human imperative.

For his three granddaughters, Asia's second richest man wished their brilliance was met with open doors and not glass ceilings.

Recalling cradling his first granddaughter's delicate fingers a decade ago, Adani said he "made a silent vow to help build a world where her aspirations would know no bounds, where her voice would resonate with the same respect as any man's, and where her worth would be measured solely by her character and contributions."

Now, blessed with three granddaughters, this promise burns brighter and more urgent than ever, he said.

To every woman, especially those who have felt overlooked, underestimated, or silenced, he said they need to know that their journey matters. "Your leadership isn't just welcome; it's essential. To every man in a position of influence, whether leading a household, a team, or an organization, I urge you to view gender equity not as a women's issue but as a human imperative. Talents, insights, and leadership of women are invaluable resources we cannot afford to squander."

- To every woman, especially those who have felt overlooked, underestimated, or silenced, he said they need to know that their journey matters

And to his granddaughters, who may one day read the blog, he said, "My dearest girls, the world you inherit should be one where your brilliance is met with open doors, not glass ceilings. Where your ambitions are never questioned, only encouraged. Where your voice is not just heard, but sought after. I vow to keep pushing, to keep breaking barriers, until that world is not just a vision but a reality. Because you, and every girl like you, deserve to walk into every room knowing you belong."

In alignment with this vision, the Adani Foundation is working in education, health, sustainable livelihoods, and infrastructure sectors to empower women. *—PTI*

Billionaire Gautam Adani with his granddaughter **PHOTO: X**

Harleen can be a force in T20 cricket: Klinger

LUCKNOW, 8 MARCH

Harleen Deol has the potential to be a long-term asset for Indian cricket, particularly in the T20 format, reckons former Australian batter and Gujarat Giants head coach Michael Klinger. Harleen has stood out with her versatility in batting for Gujarat Giants in the ongoing edition of the Women's Premier League. In their Friday's five-wicket victory against Delhi Capitals here, she anchored the chase with a match-winning unbeaten 70, guiding her team past the 177-run target with three balls to spare. Earlier in the season, she played the role of a finisher, scoring 34 not out in their six-wicket win over UP Warriorz in the Vadodara leg. Klinger credited her success to an increased attacking mindset—*PTI*

Rio Takeda takes a 2-shot lead in LPGA tournament

SANYA, 8 MARCH

Rio Takeda of Japan shot a 3-under 69 on Saturday to hold a two-shot lead after three rounds of the LPGA's Blue Bay tournament on China's southern island of Hainan. Takeda was on 9-under 207 going into Sunday's final round. The 21-year-old Takeda is looking for her second LPGA tournament victory after winning the Toto Japan Classic four months ago in a six-hole, sudden-death playoff. Takeda was two shots ahead of Gigi Stoll, Auston Kim and Cassie Porter. Stoll shot a 68, Kim finished with a 70 and Porter was on even-par 72. Jeeno Thitikul, the LPGA's No. 2-ranked player, was three shots back in a group of four players. She shot a 68. —*PTI*

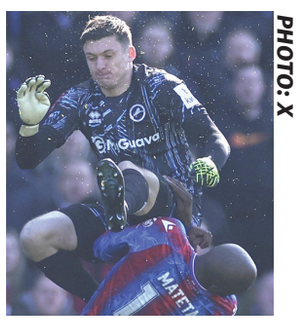

PHOTO: X

Goalkeeper's ban doubled for kicking Mateta in FA Cup

LONDON, 8 MARCH

Millwall goalkeeper Liam Roberts said on Friday he received abusive messages and threats after he kicked Crystal Palace's Jean-Philippe Mateta in the head last weekend. Roberts' three-game ban was doubled to six games on Friday after the English Football Association wanted him to be given extra punishment. During an FA Cup fifth-round match last Saturday, Roberts' dangerous challenge left Mateta needing 25 stitches on a severely lacerated ear. A standard three-match ban is issued for straight red cards, but the FA asked for a bigger suspension and an independent panel upheld the claim. Mateta was substituted and taken to hospital for specialist treatment. He was discharged later Saturday. Roberts said he reached out to Mateta to check on his condition and the Palace forward "reassured me not to worry." —*PTI*

Mainz up to 3rd in Bundesliga after win at Borussia

MONCHENGLADBACH, 8 MARCH

Mainz continued its push for a place in next year's Champions League with an accomplished 3-1 win at Borussia Mönchengladbach that lifted it into third place in the Bundesliga on Friday. Paul Nebel got the opener before halftime with a deflected shot that stranded Mönchengladbach goalkeeper Jonas Omlin. Dominik Kohr doubled the advantage six minutes into the second half when he pounced on a rebound in the box and fired home. Stefan Lainer got the home side back into the game with less than 20 minutes left but Nadiem Amiri restored Mainz's two-goal cushion just four minutes later. —*PTI*

India-NZ showdown amid farewell emotions

If this is the last act of Kohli and Rohit, then they will be eager to go out in a blaze of glory

DUBAI, 8 MARCH

Successful in keeping opponents and vitriol at bay so far, India will have to rise above traditional bugbear New Zealand and a rigmarole of emotions surrounding stalwarts Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to reclaim the Champions Trophy after 12 years here on Sunday.

India have always found the resilient Kiwis a tall mountain to surmount, as the latter hold a 10-6 lead over their Asian rivals across all the ICC tournaments.

If curated further, New Zealand have a 3-1 edge over India in the ICC knockout matches. It's a disturbing loop for them.

A section of the cricketing world has been vilifying them for the whole of last fortnight for having an unfair advantage because of their extended stay in Dubai.

In all probability, India will retain the four spinners and two pacers combination for the championship match.

Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav, the right-hand and left-hand wrist-spinners, have bamboozled the opponents like illusionists.

But Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel have been the metronomes in this Indian bowling unit, tying down the batters in a matrix of accuracy and boredom while leading them to self-destruction.

But India will not want that to happen at their expense, and would like to add another ICC trophy to their cabinet after winning the last year's T20 World Cup.

Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma had a massive role to play in that run, culminating in a glorious Barbados night.

Now, the distance to the final stop for them is getting shorter by the day.

Still, we don't know for sure whether this is the last act of Kohli and Rohit after serving Indian cricket for over a decade and half with distinction. If it is indeed so, then they will be eager to go out in a blaze of glory. —*PTI*

India's captain Rohit Sharma, head coach Gautam Gambhir, and BCCI selection committee Chairman Ajit Agarkar during a training session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final cricket match between India and New Zealand in Dubai *PHOTO: PTI*

It'll be 50-50 in the final, cricket has seen a boom in the Middle East

- Ex-women's captain Charvi Bhatt

There's plenty we've taken from the defeat to India in group stage

- Will Young, New Zealand Opener

India favourites but only just against New Zealand in CT final

- Ravi Shastri, ex- Indian head coach

Kohli gets injured ahead of finals: Report

DUBAI, 8 MARCH

India's star batter Virat Kohli suffered an injury scare during the final practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy final against New Zealand.

The 36-year-old was struck near his knee while facing a pacer in the nets at Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Physio staff attended to Kohli, applying spray and a bandage before he halted his training. However, he remained on the ground, reassuring the support staff of his condition.

India's coaching staff later confirmed that the injury was minor and that Kohli would be fit for the final on Sunday (March 9). India faces a strong challenge from New Zealand, a team that has dominated their ICC head-to-head record 10-6, including a 3-1 lead in knockout matches —*Agencies*

Javed asks 'great' Shami to not pay attention to criticism

Days after cricketer Mohammed Shami was criticised for not observing roza (fast) in the month of Ramzan during the ICC Champions Trophy semi-final match against Australia, veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar voiced his support for the bowler asking him to pay no attention to "reactionary bigoted idiots". Shami, who is part of the Indian squad for the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy tour, was spotted consuming an energy drink as the match was underway in Dubai on Tuesday. "Shami saheb, don't give a damn to those reactionary bigoted idiots, he said. —*PTI*

Pakistan experts believe CT a success, could pave way for more events

KARACHI, 8 MARCH

Despite three Champions Trophy matches in the country getting abandoned due to rain, fans losing interest after the national team's premature exit, excessive spending on revamping stadiums, a hybrid model and suffocating security measures, experts in Pakistan still believe the marquee event was a success and could open the doors for more international events.

Pakistan hosted the Champions Trophy on a hybrid model after India refused to send its team to the country due to security concerns, and instead played all its matches in Dubai.

While fans in Pakistan could not watch the arch-foes clash in one of the three refurbished venues in the country, they suffered a huge setback when Mohammad Rizwan's side was eliminated early after losing to New Zealand and India.

On the security front, though, Pakistan earned a lot of points with the event in the country not seeing a single untoward incident.

The PCB is guaranteed a USD 600,000 hosting fees apart from a share in ticket revenue, sale of hospitality boxes and some sponsorship on the grounds. But with two washouts, the board will have to refund the ticket money, meaning a hit to their earnings. —*PTI*

AGAINST AUSSIES

India beat Australia by seven wickets in the final to clinch the T20I Tri-series for the Deaf *PHOTO: PTI*

Indian team wins title in T20I Tri-series for Deaf

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

India beat Australia by seven wickets in the final to clinch the T20I Tri-series for the Deaf at the Karnail Singh Stadium here on Saturday.

South Africa was the other team in the tournament hosted by the Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA).

Kuldeep Singh of India was adjudged man of the match in the final for his five-wicket haul. He was also named the best bowler of series as well as man of the series. Abhishek Singh, also of India, was named best batter of the series.

The Indian deaf cricket team for the tournament was led by Virender Singh.

Highlighting the relevance of the tournament, IDCA President Sumit Jain said, "The energy of the players in the fiercely contested tournament underscores the need to promote cricket among the hearing-impaired athletes all over the world. "Their enthusiastic participations in the tri-series truly represent the bright future of deaf cricket and sets an inspiration for several other players." —*PTI*

INDIAN WELLS

Zverev beaten by Griekspoor

INDIAN WELLS, 8 MARCH

Tallon Griekspoor upset No. 1 seed Alexander Zverev 4-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (4) in a second-round match at the BNP Paribas Open on Friday.

The loss came eight days after Zverev also was the top seed when he was upset by American teenager Learner Tien 6-3, 6-4 in Acapulco, Mexico.

The Zverev-Griekspoor match lasted 3 hours, 7 minutes. Griekspoor collapsed on the court after converting his sixth match point for his first win over an opponent ranked in the top five.

The 28-year-old from the Netherlands improved to 2-6 against Zverev, currently ranked No. 2.

Tallon Griekspoor *PHOTO: X*

"It was such a mental thing. I lost to him five times last year and had absolute heartbreak at Roland Garros where I was up a double break in the fifth," Griekspoor said. "I played so many battles against him and had chances but they all went his way. I am incredibly proud of myself from this performance and to get it over the line." —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SHARMA LIES THIRD; AHLAWAT MAKES CUT IN JOBURG OPEN

JOHANNESBURG, 8 MARCH

Shubhankar Sharma stayed in contention at the Joburg Open with a superb 6-under 65 in the second round, following his opening 66 to reach 9-under and sit tied third at the halfway stage at Houghton Golf Club.

Shaun Norris (66-63) leads the field at 11-under despite battling an ear infection, with Frenchman Adrien Saddier (65-65) one shot behind in second. Sharma shares third place with Connor Syme (66-65).

There was further good news for India, as Veer Ahlawat, who got to the DP World Tour by topping the PGTI Order of Merit, shot 7-under 63, the day's equal best to make the cut.

He jumped from tied-127th after first round to tied-30th.

Sharma, the 2017 Joburg Open winner, fondly remembered his win.

Ahlawat was thrilled with the 7-under 63, which is his best on the DP World Tour.

Norris produced a strong 63 on Friday to lead on 11 under par overall, with Frenchman Adrien Saddier his nearest challenger on 10 under after a 65 in which he dropped at the last to sacrifice a share of the lead. —*PTI*

Tiger Woods not in field for The Players Championship

NEW YORK, 8 MARCH

Tiger Woods is not in the field for The Players Championship next week at the TPC Sawgrass, the final year of his exemption from winning the 2019 Masters.

Two of those times were at TGL. The other was with President Donald Trump on Feb. 9. He also played in the Seminole Pro-Member on Monday.

He earned a five-year exemption for The Players with that Masters win, getting an extra year to account for the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. —*PTI*

Teen star Guntas is top Indian at WAAP Championship

DA NANG, 8 MARCH

Teenage Chandigarh golfer Guntas Kaur Sandhu carded a second straight even-par round of 71 to move up four places to tied-35th in the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship on Saturday.

She is now the top Indian player with one more round to go. Guntas (73-71-71) was placed tied-39th overnight.

Mannat Brar (67-76-73), who was tied-ninth after the first day before slipping to tied-30th after the second, slid further to T-39th alongside Saanvi Somu (72-74-70). Saanvi was the only Indian to card under-par on the third day. After making the cut on the line, she has now improved from tied-50th to tied-39th.

PHOTO: PTI

Malaysian-born Jeneath Wong, 20, who shifted to Melbourne when she was 10 and is now in college in California, compiled a stunning 7-under 64 with eight birdies against one bogey to open a three-shot lead. —*PTI*

PRAGUE MASTERS TRIUMPH

Late bloomer Aravindh makes years of toil count

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

At 25, Aravindh Chithambaram is a late bloomer when compared to teenaged sensations like D Gukesh and R Praggnanandhaa who are ruling the global chess circuit right now but the manner in which he maneuvered the odds in his life through 64 squares, he seems a resilient king in the making.

His Prague Masters triumph has made the chess fraternity warm up to the Madurai born Aravindh, who lost his father when he was only three.

The mother worked as an LIC agent, and was brave enough to take a punt on his life by shifting base from Madurai to Chennai, which is India's unofficial chess capital.

Indian Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram won the Prague Masters *PHOTO: PRAGUE INTERNATIONAL CHESS FESTIVAL*

The years of sacrifice and hard work is finally paying dividends. The iconic Vellamal School, which is the alma mater of World Champion Gukesh, now has another international player of repute to boast about. After all Aravindh is Gukesh's senior.

Aravindh is now supported by the Cholamandalam group but very few remember when Viswanathan Anand lost his world title to Magnus Carlsen in Chennai back in 2013, at the same time, schoolboy Aravindh was garnering attention at the other end of the city in an International Open meet.

As on Friday afternoon after he won the Masters, Aravindh stood at number 14 in live world rankings and fourth in India. —*PTI*

French soccer unveils special jerseys for Women's Day

PARIS, 8 MARCH

Every player in the top two divisions of men's soccer in France will have "WO=MAN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names this weekend.

The French league initiative, centered around International Women's Day on Saturday, started on Friday with Toulouse's home game against Monaco, which finished 1-1. The initiative was continuing on Saturday and Sunday with the other teams in Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 as part of the league's fight against sexism.

"The message resonates as a strong statement," the LFP said in a statement. "Highlighting the importance of gender equality, not only on the field, but also in the stands."

PHOTO: X

LED panels around the pitches will display "WO=MAN" at all games and official match balls have the motto written on them. Match broadcasters DAZN and beIN SPORTS will raise awareness with halftime messages.

French sports minister Marie Barsacq attended the game and held up the jersey, surrounded by girls. —*PTI*